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Dredging project just the start

Corps ready to cope with record-low lake levels

By Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

MT. CLEMENS -- Contractors hired by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hope to finish dredging a troublesome sandbar in the Clinton River off Shadyside Park before winter sets in, ending an ambitious year of work in the Macomb County area.

But there's much more to come next year, said Corps spokesman Harry L. Salisbury.

The Corps could be involved in a handful of major projects in Macomb County, including the dredging of the Clinton River from the Crocker bridge to Gratiot as well as two environmental studies and a controversial plan to remove a sandbar off of Metropolitan Beach in Lake St. Clair.

As busy as the Corps will be, that doesn't include the prospect of another bumper year for marina and residential canal dredging permits.

The agency oversees all dredging in the Great Lakes. This year, the Corps saw a 75-percent increase in the number of dredging permits sought throughout the Great Lakes because of near record-low lake levels. The Corps issued 84 permits for the budget year 1999-2000 --- which ended Sept. 30 --- compared to 48 the previous year, said Lynn M. Duerod, another Corps spokesperson.

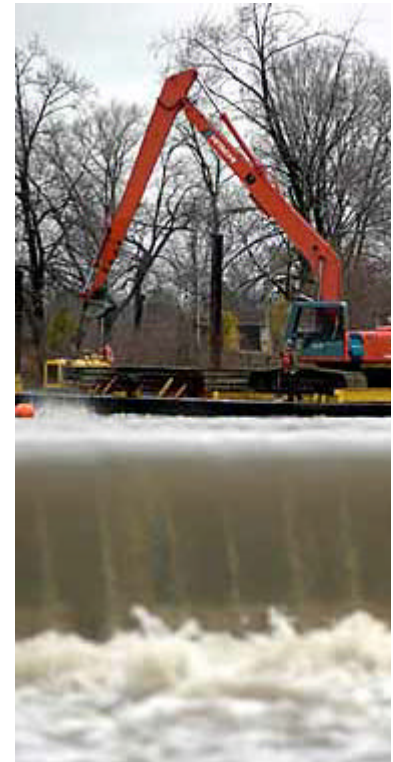
And if the lake levels rise, the Corps is ready for that, too.

Measures are being taken to prevent flooding in St. Clair Shores streets and base

The Corps and the city are in the final stages of a \$6-million flood-control system to prevent Lake St. Clair from backing up into the sewer system and flooding streets if Lake St. Clair rises again. The Corps will pay for about \$4.5 million and the city the remainder.

About 40 automated pumps will be installed along the lakefront and canals to prevent flooding.

"(The pumps) will now make neighborhoods safer from street flooding and will protect neighborhoods east and west of Jefferson," said Mark Wollenweber, St. Clair Shores manager. The automated pumps will replace manual pumps that often failed during



Todd McInturf / The I

An excavator is used to dredge and transport the dirt in trucks to the banks of the Clinton River. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers next year may dredge the Clinton River from the Crocker bridge to Gratiot, and remove a sandbar from Lake St. Clair.

conditions.

"Instead of a having a crisis, the pumps will turn on automatically," Wollenwebe

The joint operation with the Shores is an example of the many cooperative effort Corps is involved in, Salisbury said.

"We help to regionally manage water resources with state, federal and local agen said Salisbury, who is the project manager for the Detroit District of the Army Cor Engineers.

"Our biggest mission is the operation and maintenance of various harbor structur channels in the upper Great Lakes," added Salisbury, who said the Corps also mai stream bank erosion, restoration of habitat and flood control.

The proposed dredging of the Clinton next year, from Crocker to Gratiot, is a sig undertaking, said Macomb County Commissioner Michael Sessa, R-Harrison Tow

This will mark the first time the Corps has been given responsibility for purging of the river.

The Corps had two dredging projects along the Clinton River this year and will t to finish the projects in 2001 if winter weather prevents completion now.

One project is the dredging of a 4 1/2-mile stretch of the river from Lake St. Clai east of Bridgeview in Harrison to make it more navigable for boaters.

The other one entails removing tons of sediment that have built up off Shadyside over the years, making boating impossible and trapping contaminants.

The cost of these projects is \$867,000.

This year's federal budget includes funds for two new projects that could affect L Clair and its tributaries: removal of a sandbar off Metropolitan Beach in Lake St. C a \$200,000 appropriation to create a management plan for Lake St. Clair and the S River.

Salisbury said the plan would study how to maintain the current water quality in Clair, determine what the current and future state of the lake is, and possible action correct the problems.

"The funding will get us started to identify the issues and what course of action t the future," Salisbury said.

Sessa also was instrumental in obtaining \$300,000 for a federal study aimed at correcting erosion along the banks of Clinton River Spillway. The two-mile-long s channel, which runs from Shadyside to the lake, was built in the 1950s to alleviate flooding in sections of Mt. Clemens.

"When the corps built the whole thing in the 1950s it was designed to relieve flo But they just built it and left it," Sessa said.

"They never anticipated the amount of water that would come down and erode th banks," said Sessa, who credited U.S. Sen. Spence Abraham, R-Auburn Hills, for l obtain the money for the projects. Abraham lost his bid for re-election to Debbie Stabenow.

"No one would help me but Spencer Abraham. Now I am going to have to work Sen. Carl Levin and try to convince him that pollution is nonpartisan."

Although Harrison Township resident Marybeth Ruth acknowledges the need to the river, the methods used by the Corps' contractors bothers her.

"It looks like a war zone," Ruth fumed. "They are doing nothing about cleaning t they work."

Ruth said there is a sludge about six inches deep on her street, which contractors truck the sediments from the spillway.

"They make no effort to clean it," Ruth said.

Salisbury said he was unaware of any complaints, and efforts are made on all dre

projects to keep the sedimentation contained in safe areas away from neighborhood

The Corps' project to dredge a sandbar about 50 yards off the beach of Metro Beach Metropark has been put on hold while a study is conducted to see if the dredging would affect fish spawning grounds in the area.

The Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority wants to remove the buildup of sand they say contaminants are being trapped by the sandbar. And that results in high bacteria counts which force health officials to close the beach to swimming.

"We are waiting for further input to determine what possible course of action we take to improve the water quality around Metro Beach and restore a more viable aquatic ecosystem," Salisbury said.

Army Corps of Engineers projects

The Army Corps of Engineers has a number of projects which are currently under way, proposed or will begin in the coming year.

The projects include:

A project to determine if there is erosion along the banks of the spillway.

Dredging of the Clinton River and Clinton River Spillway.

Proposed dredging of sandbar located off the shore of Metro Beach Metropark.

Flood control system along the shoreline of St. Clair Shores.

A proposed Management Plan to investigate water quality of the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair.

Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Tim Summers / The Detroit News

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